



We're in the thick of the competition season and you will be facing extra pressure to convert solid ball striking into low scoring on the greens. Follow these tips to gain confidence in your putting stroke and stay calm when the heat is on

PRESSURE **PUTTING**

Photography: Ady Kerry

Rock and roll

Many amateurs complicate their putting stroke by hinging their wrists. This unnecessary movement makes rhythm and timing more difficult and control of pace and direction is left more to chance. To keep the putterhead on line throughout the stroke and to improve rhythm, rock your shoulders while keeping your wrists firm. Imagine a solid triangle between your shoulders and hands.



As you rock your shoulders, keep this triangle intact and you will find it easy to take the putterhead back in a straight line. Try to keep your wrists solid throughout the stroke.

As you swing through, feel your hands working together to maintain control over the putterhead. Before each putt on the course, devote one practice stroke to this swing thought. This helps you concentrate on the stroke without worrying about the result.



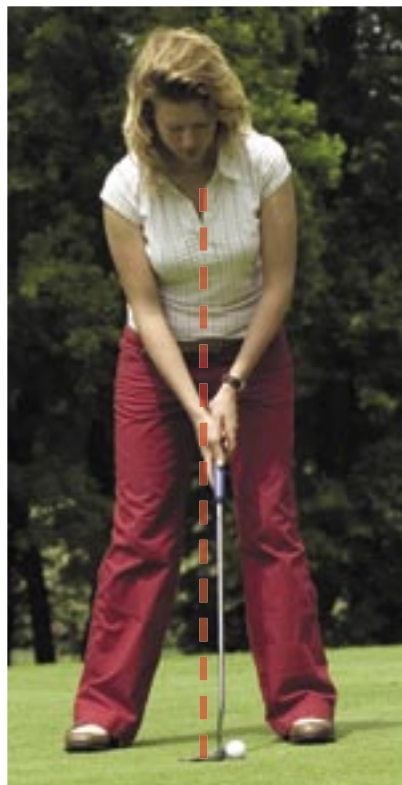
Soft touch

Although you want to maintain the triangle between your shoulders and the grip be careful not to hold the club too tightly. **A light grip will give you a better feel for a fluid stroke** so hold the club in your fingers (above). By relaxing your hands, any tension in your upper body is relieved and a smooth strike is far easier to produce.



Reading lesson

Crouch down behind your putt and take a close look at the green. Consider the putting surface as a whole, identify the major slopes and then picture how your ball will run towards the hole. Bear in mind the ball will take more break as it slows down.



Ball position

The placement of the ball in relation to your feet at address will have a major bearing on the quality of strike. For a clean strike, push the ball forward of centre in your stance, ahead of the line of your spine (left). The putterface will strike the ball on the upswing, creating light topspin which will generate a strong roll that remains on line over imperfections on the green. ▷



Collar code

When your ball is resting against the fringe of the green, hover the sole of your putter just above the grass. Aim to strike the equator of the ball to prevent long grass from snagging the clubhead. If you make solid contact, the ball should roll smoothly towards the hole but remember you will be creating topspin. Don't be too aggressive because a faster roll may leave you with a testing return putt.



Fast putt – poor strike

The ground is obviously getting harder as we reach the height of summer and any downhill putt should be treated with utmost care. **On a fast putt try lining the ball up with the toe end of the putter.** Ironically an imperfect strike – and impact sound – is what you are after. The ball will roll slower and gently make its way towards the hole.



Firing line

The rules recommend that players place an identification mark on their ball before teeing off. Use this to your advantage by drawing a straight line around your ball. When you get to the green, aim this line in the direction you want the ball to start rolling. As you stare down at the top of the putter at address, the alignment aid on the head and the mark on your ball should line up. This will help you create a straight-back-and-through stroke. ■



Meet the expert

Former county player and England international Katie Dawkins is a PGA professional at Hamptworth G&CC. She runs the New Forest Girls Golf Academy at the club, which caters for all standards of player.

